



## AT THE LIBRARY

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*“Periodical: An item which is published on a regular basis, such as journals, magazines and newspapers.”*

-University of Michigan, Shapiro Undergraduate Library, Library Glossary ([www.lib.umich.edu](http://www.lib.umich.edu))

Some of the jargon used in libraries can be difficult to understand. Even the people who use libraries are described with distinctly library-like terms, with the most frequent term being “library patron.” That is the one my library system used for many years, although recently libraries - including my own - have started using the term “customer.” I think that word was chosen because it is a way of letting people know that what they want counts.

But no matter which expression is used, it is always obvious who is being described. That can’t be said of many of the other terms used in libraries. So I thought I would define some of the most common ones.

I’ll start with interlibrary loan or ILL, since there seems to be some confusion about it. ILL is a way for libraries to borrow materials from outside libraries. This is not the same as sending a book or other material from one branch of a system to

another. That is called placing a hold or making a request. For instance, an Albany Library user might request a book be sent from the Dublin Library to the Albany one, where it can be checked out and returned. This isn’t an ILL because it is coming from a library within the same system. There is usually a fee for an ILL, while in Alameda County there isn’t a fee for placing a hold, although some libraries do charge for this.

Card catalog is another term that has been around a long time - even longer than the card catalogs themselves. It used to be that library materials were described on cards, which were housed in long wooden drawers. Some libraries continue to use this system, but most have gone to computer catalogs. I still have people tell me they looked something up in the card catalog, meaning the computer catalog, and I’m sympathetic to their memories - efficient as computers are, I loved pulling out those drawers and flipping through the cards.

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Online databases are a collection of information available on a library's website, either in the library or from an outside computer. These amazing resources are drawn from all sorts of materials, such as magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias and reference books. They can be searched in various ways, like title, author, publication name, subject or keyword.

A call number is the number on the edge of a book (on the spine label) and it indicates where in the library's collection the item can be found. If a book doesn't have a number, it is probably fiction, although biographies just have a B, followed by a name. Call numbers are used for CDs and DVDs, too.

Another common term is AV, which stands for audiovisual and includes DVDs, CDs, books on tape or CD, CD-ROMS – anything that includes

listening to or viewing.

The circulation desk is where you check out materials, and ask questions about things like fines, fees, requests and library cards. Circulation refers to the flow of library materials. Reference, on the other hand, is about the materials themselves.

Some libraries have combined the reference and circulation desks, but most of the ones I have visited still have separate ones.

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***Vertical file: A collection of pamphlets, newspaper clippings or other small published items***  
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And then there is the library term "vertical file." For years I didn't know what that meant and I was too embarrassed to ask, since everyone else seemed to know. So, in case you've heard the term and wondered what it means, here is another definition from the Shapiro Library: "Vertical file: A collection of pamphlets, newspaper clippings or other small published items."